



# Radioactive Materials

**What to do if radioactive materials are accidentally or intentionally released in our vicinity. Following these procedures will help you minimize any exposure to radiation.**

Dispersal of radioactive materials could occur from an explosive device packaged with radioactive materials. This is referred to as a Radiological Dispersal Device (an RDD or “dirty bomb”). The public impact comes from radioactive materials being expelled, carried by wind, and potentially contaminating people, buildings, vehicles, and even foods in a larger area. A typical RDD will not contain enough radioactive material to create an immediate life-threatening hazard. The hazard comes from extended exposure and the inhalation or ingestion of radioactive materials.

An attack on facilities that uses large quantities of radioactive materials could possibly release a significant amount of radioactive material. Washington State and the counties surrounding large sites, such as commercial nuclear power plants, have established procedures in place to respond to incidents. Sheltering or evacuation would be ordered for a predetermined area, probably prior to the release of any radioactive material.

An attack on a facility that uses a much smaller amount, such as certain research, industrial, or medical facilities, would result in releases much smaller in scale. Life-threatening levels of exposure are not expected from these smaller types of events.

## Stay inside

- Shelter yourself from airborne radioactive particles by staying inside your home or office, unless instructed by civil authorities to do otherwise. Close the windows, turn off the ventilation system, and stay toward the center of the house or building. If there is a basement, go there. Once the initial blast is over, the continuing risk will be from airborne radioactivity, often referred to as a drifting radioactive “cloud,” and contamination on outside surfaces.

## Listen to the radio

- When you learn that a radiological event has occurred near you, tune a radio to your local emergency broadcasting network and listen for instructions. Federal, state and local agencies will be doing everything they can to keep you informed of any protective actions that should be taken. You should keep a battery-powered radio handy in case electrical power is out in your area. Paying careful attention to any instructions given will help you minimize your exposure to radiation.

## Follow instructions

- Your best way of avoiding exposure is to do what the experts advise. If told to evacuate after the radioactive cloud has passed or gone in another direction, do so promptly but safely. Take any essential items you may need for an extended absence, such as prescription medicines and clothing. Listen for news of the location of the cloud. Even if it has already passed, radioactive contamination may have been deposited on the ground and experts will recommend the best paths to take out of the area.

## If you suspect you are contaminated

- If you feel you’ve been exposed to radioactive materials (for instance, if you were outside at the time of the event or if you have had to go outside for any reason since then), you should change into clean clothes. Place the potentially contaminated clothing in a plastic bag and seal the bag (take care not to squeeze the excess air out of the bag and into your face which potentially could cause internal contamination). Place the sealed bag in a room away from



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## **Radioactive Materials (continued)**

people. Take a lukewarm shower using plenty of soap and water to remove any contamination that may be on your skin. Cold water will close the pores of your skin trapping contamination inside; hot water will open the pores allowing contamination to enter. It is not necessary to scrub hard; you do not want to irritate the skin unnecessarily.

### **Seek help if needed**

- Special assistance centers are the best places to go for help; these will be set up as soon as possible. If this hasn't happened yet, go to a police or fire station located outside of the affected area. If you believe you were in the path of the cloud — or in the blast zone itself — tell assistance center staff. Medical evaluation can help determine the cause of symptoms, such as nausea, loss of appetite, reddening of the skin or diarrhea.

### **Watch what you eat**

- Avoid drinking fresh milk or eating garden fruit and vegetables from the affected area. Wait until the Department of Health announces that produce and dairy products are safe to eat and drink. Milk, fruit, and vegetables bought or harvested before the event (and stored indoors) are OK to eat as are canned and bagged food items. Be sure to rinse off the containers before opening.